

KENTUCKY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

STAFF NOTE

Review Item:

Kentucky's Program of Studies and High School Graduation Requirements (**Current Program of Studies under separate cover**)

Applicable Statute(s) or Regulation(s):

KRS 156:160, 704 KAR 3:305, 704 KAR 3:304

History/Background:

At the direction of the Kentucky Board of Education (KBE), the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) in partnership with the field, has clarified and refined the *Core Content for Assessment* and has developed a timeframe and implementation plan for the refocusing secondary schools' work. As a result of this work and the work of the P-16 Council, specific policy issues related to the current high school graduation requirements and the *Program of Studies* for Kentucky Schools were identified. The issues include the purpose and the content of the *Program of Studies* including merging and realigning with the refined *Core Content for Assessment* and the adequacy of the current high school graduation requirements to prepare students for the workforce and postsecondary education.

At the June 2005 KBE meeting, the Board reviewed the timeframe and implementation plan for the refocusing high school work. Included in this timeframe are specific activities related to the review of the high school graduation requirements and revisions of the Program of Studies. (Appendix A, Timeline). The purpose of this review item on *Kentucky's Program of Studies* and high school graduation requirements is to provide the KBE with: (1) background on the current policies defined in statutes and regulations, (2) graduation requirements for a sample of Kentucky school districts, (3) an overview of research and practice of other states related to high school graduation requirements current practices, and (4) graduation requirements for selected states. This information will be used to begin the discussion with the KBE on the parameters of revision for the high school graduation requirements and the *Program of Studies*. At the October 2005 KBE meeting, staff will bring forward specific recommendations for the Board's consideration.

Existing Policy. The General Assembly and the Kentucky Board of Education (KBE) have established and implemented high standards for all students in Kentucky. KRS 158.645 and KRS 158.6451 set forth the capacities and goals that frame, along with the Academic Expectations, what students should know and be able to do as the result of their public education experiences.

KRS156.160 requires the Kentucky Board of Education to promulgate regulations for the:

- (a) “courses of study for the different grades and kinds of common schools identifying the common curriculum content directly tied to the goals, outcomes, and assessment strategies developed under KRS 158.645, 158.6451, and 158.6453 and
- (b) the minimum requirements for high school graduation in light of the expected outcomes for students and schools set forth in KRS 158.6451.”

High School Graduation Requirements

The Kentucky Board of Education promulgated 704 KAR 3:305, which specifies the current minimum requirements for high school graduation. The regulation specifies the fifteen credits and seven electives as well as the requirement that each student complete an individual graduation plan with an emphasis on career development. The regulation includes the provision that “a local board of education may substitute an integrated, applied, interdisciplinary or higher level course for a required course if the alternative course provides rigorous content and addresses the same applicable components of 703 KAR 4:060 (Academic Expectations). If a substitution is made, a rationale and course description shall be filed with the Department of Education.”

Appendix B outlines the current minimum high school graduation requirements defined in 704 KAR 3:305 and includes specific questions related to each of the graduation requirements. These requirements first applied to the 2002 graduating class. School districts, under the current regulation, may establish graduation requirements beyond the minimum requirements. Appendix C provides the current graduation requirements for Kentucky school districts that show that many districts have set requirements beyond the minimum. Many districts require additional credits, courses or course-taking patterns.

704 KAR 3:305 also specifies the requirement for students to have an individual graduation plan. The requirement states, “Beginning with the graduating class of 2002, each student in a common school shall complete an individual graduation plan which incorporates emphasis on career development and shall have a total of at least twenty-two (22) credits for high school graduation.”

Appendix D provides an overview of research and practice of other states related to high school graduation requirements. Appendix E provides an overview of graduation requirements from selected states. Appendices F and G are graphics prepared by Achieve, Inc., of state mathematics and language arts requirements respectively.

Program of Studies

The Kentucky Board of Education also promulgated 704 KAR 3:304, which incorporates the requirements of the *Program of Studies* by reference. The *Program of Studies* was last revised in 1998. The *Program of Studies* outlines the required minimum course of study and content standards required for all students for the required credits for high school graduation. It also includes the content standards for primary, intermediate, and middle level programs that lead up to the high school requirements. These content standards are based on Kentucky’s learning goals, Academic Expectations, national standards, and input from professional organizations, parents, teachers and administrators. The *Program of Studies* also includes general

curriculum guidelines for preschool, primary, intermediate, middle and high school education. Additional sections address the requirements for earning high school credits in middle school, a definition for high school graduation credits, correspondence courses, the individual graduation plan, programs for children and youth with disabilities, College Board Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate Programs, gifted and talented, limited English proficiency and technology in education. There is a general section on elective programs with specific information for driver and traffic safety education, foreign language, military science and vocational education; however, it does not contain the content standards for these electives or other electives. Schools and school districts are charged with identifying the content for elective courses and designing instructional programs for all areas. In 1998 when the *Program of Studies* was last revised, the KBE decided not to include standards for elective courses. The KBE also made the decision not to include the *Core Content for Assessment* as part of the *Program of Studies* regulation. If changes needed to be made to the *Core Content for Assessment* and it was part of the regulation, the *Program of Studies* regulation would need to be opened to make the changes and the regulation revision process would have to be followed.

Since the *Program of Studies* does not contain content standards for electives, the *Program of Studies for Career and Technical Education* provides a list of course titles and descriptions, course content aligned with academic expectations, career majors and recommended course sequences for electives in the following program areas: agriculture education, business education, human services, health services, industrial education, information technology, leadership dynamics, marketing education, pathways to careers and technology education.

Based on the work to refine the *Core Content for Assessment*, feedback from the field, review of national standards, the American Diploma Project, and Achieve's review of the all of Kentucky's standards documents (under a the *Core Content for Assessment* staff note), staff recommend that the *Program of Studies* be revised to bring it better into alignment with the refined *Core Content for Assessment* and other national trends. With the refinement of the *Core Content for Assessment* and the content organization by specific grade levels, the scope of changes to the *Program of Studies* will be able to be made within the necessary timelines. The scope of the changes will be influenced by the decisions of the KBE on any changes in the high school graduation requirements and the parameters established for the work.

A copy of the current *Program of Studies* has been provided under separate cover.

Model Curriculum Framework

KRS 158.6451 further requires the Kentucky Board of Education to provide school districts and schools with “a model curriculum framework directly tied to the goals, outcomes, and assessment strategies related to KRS 158.645 and 158.6453 (Assessment of achievement of goals – Development of Commonwealth Accountability Testing System (CATS) Components – Assessment Design – Biennial plan for validation studies – Local assessment – School report card). The purpose of the framework is to provide “direction to the local districts and schools as they develop their curriculum. KRS 158.6451(1) states that the components of the framework are to include “teaching and assessment strategies, instructional materials and resources, ideas on how to incorporate the resources into the community, a directory of model

teaching sites, alternative ways of using school time, and strategies to incorporate character education throughout the curriculum”. This framework is currently *Transformations, Kentucky’s Curriculum Framework*. In addition, KDE continues to develop web-based teaching tools to support instruction and assessment.

Appendix H is a graphic that depicts the curriculum documents that specifically identify the content to be taught (Learning Goals and Academic Expectations, *Program of Studies for Kentucky Schools*, *Core Content for Assessment* – documents that the KBE may want to consider combining or condensing in some way) and the optional resources to help teachers design instruction (Program of Studies for Career and Technical Education electives, *Transformations: Kentucky’s Curriculum Framework*, Implementation Manual for the Program of Studies, How to Develop a Standards Based Unit of Study, Open Response Questions in the Classroom, and Designing an Effective Performance task for the Classroom). These curriculum documents and optional resources provide schools and districts with a basis for establishing and revising their curricula and are part of Kentucky’s Teaching Tools and the future knowledge portal.

Policy Issues:

1. Does the KBE want to maintain the current purpose or revise and expand the purpose of the *Program of Studies*?
2. How does the KBE want to merge the *Core Content for Assessment* and the *Program of Studies*, while maintaining the ability to adjust the content as we learn additional information?
3. Does the KBE want to expand or strengthen high school graduation requirements for all students?
4. If so, in what areas should the high school graduation requirements be expanded or strengthened, and in what manner (see “Considerations” on Appendix A)?
5. What additional considerations should staff investigate?

Impact on Getting to Proficiency:

The *Program of Studies* outlines the required minimum course of study and content standards required for all students for the required credits for high school graduation. If, as the Board has affirmed in previous meetings, the purpose of secondary education is to support every student to a diploma based on an individual graduation plan that prepares that student for a successful transition to a next level of learning and work, then the *Program of Studies* and the high school graduation requirements must describe a course of study that will help all students meet that goal. The expectations of secondary education, postsecondary education and the workplace must be tightly aligned at the critical transition point from high school to college and work. The *Program of Studies* and the high school graduation requirements are the primary mechanisms for articulating that alignment at the K-12 level.

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